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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 002657

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2016

TAGS: PTER PGOV PREL CO

SUBJECT: ELN NEGOTIATOR TO MEET WITH CANADIAN, DUTCH
AMBASSADORS PRIOR TO RESUMPTION OF PEACE TALKS IN MAY

REF: A. BOGOTA 2307 (NOTAL)

¶B. BOGOTA 2127 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood

Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) GOC-ELN civil society guarantors Moritz Akerman and Alvaro Jimenez outlined March 23 the new schedule for the third round of peace talks in Cuba. ELN negotiator and military commander Antonio Garcia plans to arrive in Colombia from Cuba on April 17 to meet with civil society groups in Medellin through April 21. The guarantors said the Canadian and Dutch Ambassadors would meet privately (and separately) with Garcia in Medellin. Garcia travels to Bogota April 21-24 to meet with the Catholic Episcopal Conference, before returning to Medellin April 24 for a few days. He departs Colombia for Cuba on April 28. The ELN will meet Colombian civil society groups in Havana May 2-5. The third round of talks resume on May 7 and are scheduled to last through May ¶12. Akerman said subsequent rounds could be held in Colombia. End summary.

ELN Negotiator Expected to Arrive in Colombia from Cuba

¶2. (C) Akerman and Jimenez told D/Polcouns March 23 that ELN military commander and peace talks negotiator Antonio Garcia planned to travel to Colombia from Cuba on April 17. Garcia intends to talk to civil society groups at the House of Peace ("Casa de Paz") in Medellin April 17-21 before leaving for Bogota. The guarantors said the Canadian and Dutch Ambassadors had agreed to visit Garcia privately (but separately) in Medellin. Akerman said he is talking to the Japanese Ambassador about a similar trip, but expected the Japanese to offer to share technical expertise with the ELN on Japan's regional health and education foreign assistance programs rather than meet with Garcia in person. In Bogota, Garcia will spend a few days at a conference hosted by the Catholic Episcopal Conference before returning to Medellin on April 24. He departs Medellin for Havana on April 28.

The Third Round of Talks

¶3. (C) The talks resume in Havana on May 2 with three days of ELN-civil society discussions. The formal GOC-ELN session is scheduled to last from May 7-12.

¶4. (C) Akerman said the recent death in Cuba of ELN hardliner Oscar Santos would likely encourage the ELN to be more positive in its dealings with the GOC. Santos was informed of all developments "up to the moment of his death," and played a negative role during the first two rounds. Akerman and Jimenez added that Ramiro Vargas, one of the three ELN negotiators, "has been in Havana too long and has lost touch with the contemporary world." They regarded negotiators Garcia and Francisco Galan as more constructive than Vargas.

¶5. (C) The guarantors said they expected pressure would grow on the GOC and ELN to move subsequent rounds of talks from Cuba to Colombia, provided that Garcia's April trip to Colombia was uneventful. Akerman said he was worried about the relationship between Garcia and Peace Commissioner Restrepo, because both men had "stubborn and controlling personalities".

Different Perceptions of the Agenda

¶6. (C) Akerman said the ELN and GOC have different ways of envisioning the substantive agenda, but claimed the two sides are not necessarily far apart. He outlined the ELN's 5 agenda items for the May round: (1) "what is peace, and how can it be achieved"; (2) "how can civil society participate in the peace process?"; (3) "how can the international community participate in the peace process?"; (4) "the peace process environment, including cease fire issues"; and (5) "procedures or modalities." The GOC, on the other hand, was focused on cease fire as the first agenda item, followed by consideration of the ELN's call for a "National Convention" that would address social questions. In Akerman's view, if the GOC is patient it could work with the ELN on its first three agenda items, mostly listening, before getting to the ELN's fourth point, cease fire, which is close to the GOC's initial objective.

Support, Concerns

¶7. (C) Akerman and Jimenez said most civil society groups associated with the peace process are constructive, but some argue the ELN should not do anything to help President Uribe win reelection, and others go further, saying the ELN should not negotiate unless the FARC is also at the table. (The guarantors say they are convinced the FARC is strongly opposed to the ELN's participation in talks with the GOC.)

WOOD